

Quebec’s legendary alpacas

are one focus of ‘agri-tourism’ in the province

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Joint owner of the alpaca farm, Lise, (left) helps to deliver an alpaca baby.

During a recent visit to an alpaca farm in Quebec, I was presented with a pair of socks, made from alpaca fibre. Since such socks are not available in stores, this was a unique present.



Beekeeper-owner Jacques displays a beehive where bees live in a natural habitat.

Who are the alpacas, was my question? Alpacas are domesticated species of South America, resembling a small llama in appearance, belonging to the camel family — the difference being that while llamas are used as pack animals, alpacas are raised mainly for their soft wool. There are no wild llamas or alpacas.

I was able to enrich my knowledge of alpacas during a recent visit to Les Alpaga ferme Norli, an alpaca farm operated by the husband and wife team, Lise and Normand Pollender, in Quebec’s eastern townships, a few hours’ drive from Quebec City. The couple whose passion has always been agriculture and animals, ended by specializing in alpaca breeding and manufacturing products from their fine quality fibres.

“I saw an alpaca for the first time during an agricultural exhibition in 2000. I immediately fell in love with these little animals, as much for the softness of their character as the quality of their fiber,” remembers Lisa. The couple, who are also staunch pet lovers and fourth-generation farmers, have over 100 different types of alpacas.

On a tour of the farm, Lise mentioned in passing that one of the female alpacas in her herd of 100 might deliver a baby while we were there. The news was received with a lot of excitement among the group, especially photo journalists, for

whom this would be a once in a lifetime experience.

We continued touring the farm and taking pictures of groups of alpacas wandering around, eating grass and involved in various other activities. The farm also has a boutique where different merchandize made from alpaca hair is displayed and offered for sale to the public.

“The boutique offers knitting yarn from our alpacas, spun directly in our spinning mill as well as knitwear for the whole family made by us and our knitters,” Lise proudly explained. For the home, one can buy beautiful rugs, bedspreads and cushions or gifts of scarfs or caps for the family.

Alpaca wool has unique characteristics as it is five times warmer and lighter than sheep’s wool, and is considered a luxury fiber. Its quality even surpasses that of the Kashmir and its fiber comes in over 22 natural colors which can be produced by mixing these fibers.

Our tour was interrupted when a staff member came running to inform us that the pregnant alpaca was ready to deliver. We all scrambled to secure a good vantage point to mark the occasion. Lise, accompanied by three staff, at once took charge of the operation, surrounding the expectant mother, forming a maternity team.

Birth of a child is an occasion for celebration and merriment. It’s also considered a



The new-born alpaca is carried to its mother by a staff member of the farm.

good omen. To my utter amazement, I found out that even some animals celebrate a birth same as human beings do.

As the group watched with eagerness and excitement, we could see the baby’s feet first coming out from the mother’s body and within minutes the baby’s head cropped up, clearly seen by all onlookers. There was a sigh of jubilation and words of encouragement for the mom alpaca from the group, until the baby’s complete body was on the ground. The baby lay mercilessly on the ground and tried to get up several times, but failed. The mother sniffed the newly-born, who was surrounded by other alpacas as a sign of acceptance and welcome to their community. An incredible and amazing experience, but unfortunately not celebrated with cigars.

Lise explained that the alpaca fiber is elastic, resistant and thermal, making it perfect for different climates. “An item of alpaca wool clothing will maintain its corporal temperature in any type of environment. Its natural shine and its smoothness produces high quality wool, ideal for the textile industry especially as alpaca blankets” she said.

Excited by the unique experience, we continued our tour of nature by visiting a captivating guided tour focussing on the life of bees and honey production. The Miellerie Lune de Miel, located just five minutes from Sherbrook, offers tours of the fascinating world of bees and honey. Here, one can watch bees in action and listen to a professional beekeeper unravel the mysterious behaviour of bees and explain the honey

extraction process.

“Beekeeping at Lune de Miel has not changed. Our philosophy has remained the same since the beginning — which is the use of hives and frames made of natural wood and the freedom given to bees to completely fabricate their cells by producing their own wax, just as in their natural habitat,” explained the beekeeper-owner Jacques.

Despite suffering from diabetes, I couldn’t resist tasting 15 varieties of honey. One can find a variety of wrappings, candles, royal jelly, pollen, beauty products, and many souvenirs at their gift boutique. It’s definitely a fun place to visit for the entire family.

Quebec’s Eastern Townships, are full of breathtaking scenery, picturesque villages and towns offering a warm welcome to visitors. Their tourist attractions and activities would fill your days, providing cozy accommodation and unique gourmet experiences. Tourists are bound to take precious memories home.

There’s so much to discover and learn about Quebec products, that you’ll need to take to the road and make the acquaintance of the farmers and artisans who shape and transform Quebec with such passion. Today there are so many vineyards, wineries, cheese makers, maple groves and sugar shacks, farms, honey producers, microbreweries and more, which fill the province’s pantries. These operations also supply restaurants, specialty grocery stores and boutiques with tasty Quebec products. Also, deserving mention are the farmers and artisans who process goat’s milk, lavender, emu oil, mohair and alpaca



A couple relax in the outdoor hot tub at Hotel Ripplecove.

wool into beauty products or fabrics and warm clothing.

Depending on the location selected, visit a Farm Shop, a Farm Exploration or a sugar shack — it’s fun to watch animals up close and feed them, enjoy a sweet snack, sample good wines, ciders, ice ciders, ice wines, local cheeses, or visit a U-pick for strawberries, blueberries, raspberries or apples. In brief, you can plan outings based around food and take advantage of the many products from Quebec.

Moreover, agritourism is an authentic, original way to tour Quebec. When you stop at a Farm Shop, a Farm Exploration or a sugar shack, you’ll be amazed at the diversity of regional products and the originality of the tours and activities offered.

Tourists can enhance their vacation by visiting an agri-tourism farm in Quebec and discover the know-how of Quebec’s growers and producers. One is bound to meet cheesemakers, winemakers, vegetable growers and ranchers!

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